

# Flexible Training and Progression Through Training Policies Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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## Purpose, Scope and Background

### 1. What is the Purpose & Scope of the Flexible Training policy?

The purpose of this policy is to detail the provisions for flexible training in RACP training programs. These provisions are designed to:

- a) Encourage retention of RACP trainees who are unable to train on a full-time continuous basis.
- b) Support diversity, equity, inclusion, anti-discrimination and wellbeing in training.
- c) Assist trainees to pursue training whilst fulfilling other obligations such as carer responsibilities.
- d) Support continued training in programs on a time-equivalence (pro-rata) basis.

This policy outlines the flexible training options available for RACP trainees (including post Fellowship trainees). The policy details provisions for part-time training and interruptions to training (including parental leave).

This policy applies to all RACP Division, Faculty and Chapter training programs offered in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.

### 2. What is the Purpose & Scope of the Progression Through Training policy?

The purpose of this policy is to outline provisions for completion of training requirements, time limits to complete training programs, prospective approval and certification of training, and failure to progress in training.

This policy applies to all RACP Division, Faculty and Chapter training programs offered in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.

### 3. Why were the policies recently revised?

The Flexible Training policy was scheduled for routine review in 2023. Following feedback from the Gender Equity in Medicine Working Group (GEMWG) and other members identifying opportunities to better support gender equity through policy change, the Board asked the College Education Committee to expedite a review of the policy.

The Progression through Training Policy was updated in 2020 to reflect the interim changes to requirements, including a provision that allowed trainees to take up to 14 days of COVID-19 leave per clinical year, without it affecting their training time or RACP leave allowance while the pandemic is being managed.

The COVID-19 leave provision ceased at the end of the 2023 training/clinical year. Following a review of the interim changes to requirements by the College Education Committee, an Isolation Leave provision was added to the policy.

#### **4. When will the revised policies come into effect?**

The updated Flexible Training policy is in effect from 1 January 2023 and is applicable for the 2023 training/clinical year onwards. The revised policy applies to all RACP trainees, including those who commenced training prior to 2023.

The updated Progression Through Training policy is in effect from 31 January 2024 and is applicable for the 2024 training/clinical year onwards.

### **Provisions and applications of flexible training**

#### **1. What is flexible training?**

Flexible training encompasses a broad range of options such as part-time training and interrupting training. There are many different reasons why trainees may require access to flexible training, although common reasons include parental leave, medical leave or study leave.

#### **2. What are the key changes to the policy?**

The key changes introduced from 2023 include:

- a) The 24-month cap on the amount of Interrupted Training, taken due to parental leave, that could be excluded from accruing towards the maximum time limit to complete training has now been removed. Trainees can now access unrestricted amounts of Interrupted Training for parental leave reasons.
- b) Periods of Interrupted Training taken due to certified medical leave are now excluded from accruing towards the maximum time limit to complete training.
- c) The standard minimum full-time equivalent considered eligible for training has been decreased from 0.4FTE to 0.2FTE. As per current arrangements, proposals for part-time training arrangements will continue to be considered for approval by the relevant training program committee. When considering these proposals, the committee will determine whether the proposed training plan meets the outlined learning objectives and will not reject the proposal based primarily upon the size of the FTE fraction proposed. While the RACP actively encourages training providers to offer trainees flexible training opportunities, the decision whether to accommodate specific requests by individuals for flexible working arrangements rests with the employer.
- d) Introduction of 'return to training plans'- these will be required for trainees who interrupt training for 24 continuous months or more. We are developing templates and support resources regarding these and will communicate more details about this change in early 2023.

These changes to the existing policy are designed to improve access to flexible training for all trainees and ensure a focus remains on educational outcomes.

### **3. Will these changes override previous decisions regarding approved or certified training?**

No. These changes are applicable for training undertaken from 2023 onwards. Changes to the policy do not void previous decisions made regarding the approval or certification of training.

### **4. What is eligible to be classified as parental leave?**

In the context of the Flexible Training policy, this refers to an interruption (full-time) due to maternity, paternity, adoptive leave or permanence order, whāngai, miscarriage, stillbirth or termination. The RACP does not require details of the reasons for parental leave to confirm eligibility for this provision. To confirm eligibility for parental leave, the trainee will need to provide a medical certificate confirming that they are on parental leave (per the definition provided in Section 7 of the Flexible Training policy).

### **5. What is eligible to be classified as medical leave?**

In the context of the Flexible Training policy, this refers to an interruption (full-time) due to medical reasons, as evidenced by a medical certificate issued by a registered medical practitioner. The RACP does not require details of the reasons for medical leave to confirm eligibility for this provision. To confirm eligibility, the trainee will need to provide a medical certificate confirming that they are on medical leave and not fit to undertake physician training throughout the period of interruption (per the definition provided in Section 7 of the Flexible Training policy).

### **6. What is a training year?**

A training year refers to the calendar year in which the majority of the annual training experiences occur. A training year is sometimes known as clinical year or medical year and may differ slightly for each training program or jurisdiction.

### **7. What are work-based learning and assessment tools?**

For [Basic Training](#), work-based learning and assessments tools include: Mini-Clinical Evaluation Exercises, Learning Needs Analyses and Professional Qualities Reflections.

For [Advanced Training](#), these differ according to each training program, but often include: Mini-Clinical Evaluation Exercises, Case-based Discussions, Direct Observations, Learning Needs Analyses and Professional Qualities Reflections.

## **8. What is the maximum time a trainee can interrupt their training for parental or medical leave?**

Under the updated policy, there is no limit on the amount of time a trainee can interrupt their training for parental or medical leave. However, a trainee who has completed Basic Training (Divisions) must commence Advanced Training (Divisions) within five years of completing Basic Training. No more than two consecutive years may be spent away from clinical work during the interval between completing Basic Training and commencing Advanced Training.

Trainees taking a break from medical practice are advised to review the requirements issued by the relevant medical registration authority regarding recency of practice and return to practice.

## **9. How many interruptions to training can trainees apply for?**

Trainees may apply for interruption or part-time training as many times as they wish and for as long as they wish at any stage of training. However, all training program requirements must be completed within the relevant time limit set out in the [Progression Through Training policy](#).

## **10. What is the Return to Training Pathway?**

The Return to Training Pathway (RTP) supports trainees who have been on an extended interruption of training for more than 24 continuous months. It identifies what support trainees might need during the first six months back in training using a Return to Training Plan.

A Return to Training Plan is a working document between a trainee, their DPE/Supervisor, the Training Support Unit (TSU) and the relevant training program committee. It is designed to outline a supportive return to training pathway for a trainee after an extended period of leave.

The Return to Training Plan supports trainees to:

- set out their goals
- track progress and achievements
- document discussions with their supervisor or DPE

## **11. When do I need to complete a Return to Training Plan?**

If training is interrupted for more than 24 continuous months, a Return to Training Plan is required. The relevant training program committee will then consider on a case-by-case basis the learning needs of the trainee and what activities are required to support the transition back to training. These activities may include teaching, learning and assessment activities, and in circumstances where absence from medical practice has been significantly extended, these may include supplementary periods of work-based training.

If training is interrupted for more than 12 continuous months, the Return to Training plan is a voluntary tool for trainees who feel that they would benefit from extra support during their transition back to training for the first six months.

## **12. Where can I get more information on Return to Training Plans?**

Further information on [Return to Training Plans](#) is now available on the College Website.

To access the RTP, trainees can contact their DPE/Supervisor or the [Training Support Unit](#), who will guide them through the process.

## **13. Can an application for part-time training be declined by the RACP?**

If the proposed training plan does not meet the educational requirements of the program, a part-time training application may be rejected. A training plan will not be rejected based primarily upon the size of the FTE fraction proposed. You will be notified in writing of the decision and the reasons for it.

## **14. Will my time accrued towards the time limit to complete training be recalculated?**

Calculations regarding time accrued towards the maximum time limit for training for current trainees will be redetermined upon provision of evidence that past Interruptions were taken due to parental or medical leave.

## **Isolation Leave**

### **1. What is eligible to be classified as Isolation Leave?**

In the context of the Progression Through Training policy, Isolation Leave is leave that is taken due to a jurisdictional or workplace policy requiring that a trainee is excluded from participation in the workplace due to risk of transmitting a communicable disease. Examples of reasons for taking this type of leave may include, but not be limited to, contracting illnesses such as COVID-19, RSV or Influenza.

### **2. What supporting evidence do I need to provide?**

Evidence of your requirement to isolate such as a medical certificate, evidence from your employer or a Statutory Declaration is required to confirm eligibility for this leave.

Suggested wording for a Statutory Declaration could include the following: "I declare that from ddmmyyy to ddmmyyy I was required to isolate from my place of training due to a potentially transmissible condition. This leave was taken in accordance with, and in the spirit of, the RACP's Progression Through Training policy Isolation Leave provision."

### 3. What is the maximum time a trainee can take for Isolation Leave?

Under the updated policy, a trainee can take up to two weeks (10 working days) of Isolation Leave per clinical year without it affecting their certifiable training time or RACP absence from training allowance.

### 4. How do *Isolation Leave* and *Absence from training provisions* work together?

Trainees can access up to eight weeks (40 working days) of allowable absence from training without reducing their certifiable training time for reasons that include but aren't limited to annual leave, study leave, sick or carers leave, conference leave, long service leave and absence due to industrial action. In addition to this, trainees who meet the eligibility criteria can access an additional two weeks (10 working days) of Isolation Leave, meaning that in some circumstances there is a total of ten weeks (50 working days) of leave that can be accessed before certifiable training time is impacted.

### 5. Can I take Isolation Leave for Carer's Responsibilities?

Your jurisdictional or workplace policies determine what is considered as Isolation Leave. For example, if your jurisdictional or workplace policy requires that an employee is excluded from participation in the workplace due to risk of transmitting a communicable disease that a household member/dependent has contracted, this would fall under the Isolation Leave provision. Otherwise, this type of leave would fall under the usual eight weeks of absence from training referred to in item 4.5.1 and further defined in item 7 of the Progression Through Training Policy.

## Roles and Responsibilities

### 1. What role do trainees play?

Trainees need to have a comprehensive understanding of the Flexible Training and Progression Through Training policies as well as their responsibilities as adult learners, the ability to manage their professional development and willingness to meet College requirements.

As expected of trainees undertaking full-time, continuous training pathways, trainees undertaking flexible training pathways must meet the educational standards of the training program. As with all physician trainees, trainees seeking flexible training arrangements are responsible for securing a suitable training position.

### 2. What role do the training program committees play?

Relevant training program committees will play an active role in overseeing the progress of trainees. The updated policy provides additional information on training requirements so that committees can facilitate fair and transparent evidenced based reviews of applications for prospective approvals of training and interruptions to training.





### **3. What role do employers play?**

Employers in Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand must abide by the relevant employment and anti-discrimination legislation.

While the RACP actively encourages training providers to offer trainees flexible training opportunities, the decision whether to accommodate specific requests by individuals for flexible working arrangements rests with the employer.

### **4. Can I appeal a decision?**

Yes, the College Reconsideration, Review and Appeals process is available to all eligible decisions, as defined by the College By-Law: Reconsideration, Review and Appeals Process.

### **5. Who can I contact for more information?**

If you have any additional questions or require support, please contact [Member Services](#).